

Are You Who I Think You Say You Are?: Effects of Linguistic Abstraction on Applicant
Evaluation Using Third Party Descriptions

An Honors Thesis (PSYS 499)

by

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Abstract

Although language is well understood as a social construct, little attention has been given to the effect of semantically constructed meaning on individual perception. When people talk about themselves or others, subtle variations in linguistic style can influence evaluations of the subject. The current study was designed to examine differences in evaluation based on the principle of linguistic abstraction. Semantic language exists on a spectrum between the concrete (what is physically present) and the abstract (that which exists solely as an ideological concept). Abstraction influences the extent to which a listener infers a casual attribution about the subject. Two mock letters of recommendation were prepared that varied as a function of abstract language. It was hypothesized that a job candidate who was described more abstractly would be viewed more positively than one who was described concretely. Results of the study and its implications for future research are discussed at length.

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Effects of Linguistic Abstraction on Applicant Evaluation Using Third Party Descriptions

In the field of psycholinguistics, the psychological study of language, it is understood that language can have a significant impact on psychological processes, behaviors, and attitudes. But these effects are not isolated to the individual: Language is an inherently social process, designed for communication among people. It is for this reason that language is tied to social action, perception, and evaluation (Holtgraves, 2002; Smith & Semin, 2007). Interpersonal research in psychology has proven valuable to the extent that it reflects prominent social constructs, such as race relations, gender, and stereotype maintenance. Research on interpersonal relationships has recently turned toward specific elements in language to explain the maintenance of intergroup relations (e.g. Maas, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989; Semin & Fiedler, 1988; Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000). Within this line of research, implicit causality (Brown & Fish, 1983), by which causal attributions are inferred through linguistic structure, has been a prominent area of study for over three decades. Yet the scope and impact of this phenomenon remains fairly unknown, especially when making impressions about other people. For this reason, the current study focuses on the effects of abstract and concrete language on professional evaluations.

Many facets of our modern world depend on the evaluations of individuals by others; it is a process by which people are hired, graded, elected, and awarded. Those under scrutiny of evaluation may try to improve their image or likeability through persuasion. Campaigns and slogans are often tailored to lead the individual to infer beyond the words themselves.

Psycholinguistic concepts explain the effects of language on cognitive processing. Language use can either be categorized as abstract, discussing ideas and concepts not physically present, or concrete, focusing on the physical aspects of the world around us. Moreover, the same person can be described using either abstract or concrete language. By manipulating the levels of

linguistic abstraction used in written evaluations, namely letters of recommendation, it is expected that the individual perceptions of prospective raters will significantly differ.

Linguistic Abstraction

Linguistic abstraction is a form of implicit causality that refers to the extent that an observer can draw causal inferences from specific parts of speech. The Linguistic Category Model (LCM; Semin & Fiedler, 1998) operationally defines linguistic abstraction through a combination of adjectives and verbs (from the most abstract to the least abstract): adjectives, state verbs, interpretive action verbs (IAVs), and descriptive action verbs (DAVs). Adjectives are abstract trait descriptions. In causal attributions, traits represent a stable cause of behavior over time, which cannot be confirmed nor disconfirmed as true (for example, how do we know if someone is honest if we cannot physically perceive honesty?). State verbs, such as “Jack *likes* Jill,” suggest that a sentence’s object (Jill) is responsible for the emotional action from the sentence’s subject (Jack), and usually stems from some inherent quality of the object. IAVs and DAVs differ in the objectivity of the action being performed. IAVs are the more abstract of the two, and imply a nonspecific action that could be subject to interpretation (e.g. encourage, comfort, succeed). DAVs, being the most concrete category of the LCM, encompass physical action verbs (e.g. hit, jump, write) that are objective and can be readily witnessed (Semin & Fiedler, 1988).

The difference between levels of abstractness is two-fold. First, the word categories vary on the principle of consensus, or the frequency with which a trait or behavior can be found in the general population (Brown & Fish, 1983). Adjectives and other abstract words provide lower consensus than action verbs. The reasoning follows that not all individuals can be readily prescribed a specific trait (as traits are difficult to visualize); action verbs, however, represent

readily available behaviors that many individuals could be perceived of doing. The second difference involves the distinctiveness of traits and behaviors. The fact that someone is selfish may not be as cognitively available as an isolated, selfish action, implying that people find it easier to envision isolated actions as opposed to overlying abstract concepts. It naturally follows that high consensus can be paired with high distinctiveness and low consensus with low distinctiveness (Brown & Fish, 1983).

The perception of abstract language seems to go largely unnoticed at the conscious level. Individuals are often too cognitively busy to allot the time and resources required to analyze all aspects of incoming social information (Smith & Collins, 2009). This lack of recognition allows for the perpetuation of stereotypes and expectancies without requiring thoughtful processing on the part of the listener, rendering linguistic abstraction a powerful influence in making causal attributions (e.g. Maass et al., 1989). Indeed, it has been found that abstraction is processed in such a way that the individual can interpret meanings that go “beyond the impact of the specific content or subject” in question (Wigboldus et al., 2000, p. 16). Over the past 30 years, psycholinguists have discovered several contexts in which linguistic abstraction plays a major role.

Applications of Linguistic Abstraction

Abstractness is ranked according to the extent that the word’s usage suggests the responsibility of a stable trait as a cause for an individual’s actions. In their study of prejudice and discrimination, Maass et al. (1989) utilized the LCM to develop the concept of Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB), which explains how causal attributions are made between social ingroups and outgroups. The LIB states that positive ingroup behaviors and negative outgroup behaviors are described more abstractly to represent the stability over time. Conversely, negative ingroup

behaviors and positive outgroup behaviors are described more concretely to emphasize situational factors rather than any individual disposition (Maass et al., 1989). The LIB is just one example of how varying levels of linguistic abstraction affect social perceptions and how these inferences are involved in the creation and maintenance of stereotypes, prejudices, and bases for discrimination (Maass et al., 1989; Wigboldus et al., 2000). Similarly, the Linguistic Expectancy Bias (LEB) demonstrates how expectant (or stereotype-consistent) behaviors are described with greater abstraction than unexpected behaviors (Douglas & Sutton, 2003; Karpinski & von Hippel, 1996; Wigboldus et al., 2000). Both LIB and LEB are prevalent examples of how abstract language holds influence in social situations.

The use of linguistic abstraction does not seem to occur at the conscious level (Douglas & Sutton, 2003). However, research has suggested that linguistic abstraction can be subjected to motivated manipulation. In a later study concerning LIB, Maas, Ceccarelli, and Rudin (1996) conducted an experiment that manipulated the level of “threat” that an outgroup posed to the ingroup participants; accordingly, threats to ingroup identity resulted in greater linguistic abstraction used when describing outgroup behaviors. Douglas & Sutton (2003) found similar motivated processing during a study in which linguistic abstraction was moderated by communication goals. Finally, Menegatti and Rubini (2014) recently discovered that romantic partners are more likely to use abstract language (adjectives and state verbs) when persuading their partner to continue their relationship. These examples of self-defense, achievement, and persuasion suggest that the scope and influence linguistic abstraction are much more flexible than originally believed, with seemingly generalized applications in various facets of everyday communication patterns. Therefore, while the use of abstract language appears to be largely unconscious, it can be primed into motivated use depending on the context.

Yet abstract language represents only one side of a continuum: concrete language has also been shown to have significant effects on perception. For example, concrete statements may be perceived as “more true” than abstract statements (Hansen & Wänke, 2010). This harkens back to the LIB in that abstract statements are difficult to prove or disprove, while concrete statements may provide more cognitive closure (Maass et al., 1989). It has been shown that concrete anecdotes are weighed more heavily than abstract information when making decisions (Borgida & Nisbett, 1977). Concrete language is also employed more when terminating an interpersonal relationship, such as a romantic break up (Menegatti & Rubini, 2014). These examples represent the necessity for concreteness when making definitive decisions or permanently ending engagements.

To summarize, abstract linguistic forms, such as adjectives and state verbs, are difficult to visualize and contest, making them useful for perpetuating status and image. Concrete forms, such as IAVs and DAVs, inhibit generalization and are easier to visualize, and prove useful when required to make definitive decisions. The current study seeks to examine the role of abstraction in decision-making based on individual qualities in the form of evaluations in order to uncover which of these two linguistic forms holds more weight.

Abstraction and Evaluative Judgment: The Current Study

Many decisions require individuals to evaluate others through the use of a communicative medium. Yet very little research exists relating linguistic abstraction to individual impression management. A recent study has shown abstract language to be associated with social power, in that people who use abstract language are perceived as possessing power (Wakslak, Smith, & Han, 2014). When constructing a social perception about someone else, it would seem that the subject’s power relative to the perceiver plays an important role in evaluating information.

Levels of abstraction have also been found to differ based on need for closure (Webster, Kruglanski, & Pattison, 1997). It seems that concrete language, too, holds weight when making decisions. These examples suggest that both abstract and concrete language are mediating factors in personal judgment, but the pattern or relationship between the two has yet to be established.

The current study has been designed to build upon practical approaches to linguistic abstraction by expanding the understanding of these differences in perception. A letter of recommendation format was used to measure which of the two has a greater observed effect on evaluative outcomes: an abstract letter emphasizing the employee's personal traits (and in turn lending credibility to the letter writer for their perceived power), or a concrete depiction of the employee's behaviors, which should prove more useful in providing closure for the decision-making process. In general, it is hypothesized that a difference in abstraction will produce significantly different applicant evaluations. Past research suggests a variety of effects related to both abstract and concrete language use, which is often dependent upon the context of what is being said. Specifically, the effects of linguistic abstraction appear dependent upon the subject, the speaker, and the purpose. Because of these parameters, initial hypothesizing proves difficult as these factors interact to produce different outcomes in overall perception across different situations. Therefore, based on the exploratory nature of the current study, the initial hypothesis remains open due to the under-established pattern of abstract language use across contexts.

Method

Participants

Fifty participants were recruited from the Ball State University subject pool and through Ball State University e-mail on a voluntary basis, 11 of whom failed to complete the study.

Participants were aged 18 and older (median age 19). An incentive was given in the form of ½ hour of research credit for the entry level Psychological Science course.

Materials

Job Description. Each participant was shown a job description that outlined the duties and expectations for an available Human Resource Manager position.

Letters of recommendation. Two mock letters of recommendation were prepared. Both letters contained recommendations by a previous supervisor of the applicant to the Human Resource Manager position. The letters were tailored so that their overall message was the same, but the specific elements of language use differed as a function of abstractness. One letter described the candidate using adjectives (e.g. helpful, supportive, committed), while the other letter emphasized specific actions of the candidate using IAVs (e.g. helped, supported, committed). These letters are presented in the Appendix.

Candidate questionnaire. A questionnaire followed the letter of recommendation. The first set of questions asked participants about different qualities of the employee's confidence and job fit, the supervisor's confidence and trustworthiness, and hireability. The second set of items required participants to rate the candidate's basic personal traits (creative, encouraging, supportive, helpful, committed, organized, productive). A final set of items elicited inferences from the participants based on the extent that they agreed with generalized or specific statements about the candidate's character. These included trait congruent statements, which corresponded with abstract language, and trait incongruent statements, which corresponded with concrete language, and thus represent exceptions rather than an overarching trait. The answer format for all questions followed a 7-point Likert scale, asking respondents, for example, the extent to

which they agree with the given statements (e.g. 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The exact questions and their corresponding Likert scales are presented in the Appendix.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study online through Qualtrics. Participants were told that the purpose of study was to read and evaluate a letter of recommendation based on the candidate, writer and job fit. After giving informed consent, each participant was shown the job description for a Human Resource Manager position, followed by one of the two letters concerning Jim, a prospective applicant for the position. Each letter was followed by the candidate questionnaire, to which participants responded to the hireability, trait, and inference scales. The two variants of the letter shown to the participants are presented in the Appendix.

Results

Measurements

I hypothesized that abstract and concrete language would produce significantly different applicant evaluations. The three question domains examined were candidate hireability, candidate traits, and inferences that could be made about the candidate. All of these results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Independent-Samples t-tests for the Three Domains

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Abstract</u>		<u>Concrete</u>		<u>df</u>	<u>t</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Hireability	36.69	4.89	36.38	4.04	37	.209
Traits	42.85	5.87	43.31	4.71	35	-.265
Inferences	60.36	6.10	63.11	9.50	37	-.883

Candidate hireability. The first set of six questions comprised a hireability scale (see appendix; $\alpha = .866$). These questions elicited perceptions of candidate fit, confidence of both the candidate and supervisor, and overall hireability (e.g. *To what extent does Jim appear fit for this job?*). An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference between abstract and concrete conditions for hireability ($t = .209, p > .1$). Participants who read the abstract condition ($M = 36.7, SD = 4.9$) did not rate the six items differently than those who read the concrete condition ($M = 36.4, SD = 4.0$).

Candidate traits. The second set of seven items acted as a manipulation check to test whether the abstract and concrete conditions created a difference in perception ($\alpha = .849$). These items consisted of a basic trait analysis (*Jim is helpful, Jim is supportive, etc.*). An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference between abstract and concrete conditions for perceptions of the candidate's traits ($t = -.265, p > .1$). Participants who read the abstract condition ($M = 42.9, SD = 5.9$) did not rate these items differently than those who read the concrete condition ($M = 43.3, SD = 4.7$).

Inferences about the candidate. The last fourteen items served as a higher-order manipulation check used to gauge whether the participants made different inferences about the candidate as a person as a function of the abstract and concrete conditions ($\alpha = .741$). These items asked the extent to which participants agreed with various statements that either generalized Jim's behavior (*Jim regularly volunteers outside of work*) or did not (*Jim tries to appear helpful for the sake of his image*). Removal of the item *Jim makes an effort to work well with others* raised internal reliability to .778. An independent-samples t-test found no significant difference between abstract and concrete conditions for the types of inferences made about the candidate ($t = -.883, p > .1$). Participants who read the abstract condition ($M = 60.4, SD = 6.1$)

did not rate these items differently than those who read the concrete condition ($M = 63.1$, $SD = 4.0$). Because of the insignificant differences found in each item set and overall, the original hypothesis cannot be supported.

Exploratory Analysis

t-test for hireability items. Because the overall hireability measure contains heterogeneous items that measure various aspects of the candidate, supervisor, and hireability, further independent-samples t-tests were performed for each individual item. These t-tests found no significant differences between abstract and concrete conditions for individual scores on these items. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Independent-Samples t-tests for Individual Hireability Items

<u>Question</u>	Abstract		Concrete		<u>df</u>	<u>t</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Supervisor confidence	6.69	.855	6.69	.549	37	.000
Candidate confidence	6.62	.650	6.42	.703	37	.825
Likelihood of being hired	6.15	.987	5.92	.935	37	.714
Supervisor trustworthiness	5.31	1.109	5.46	1.029	37	-.429
Candidate job fit	6.15	1.214	6.08	.935	37	.219

Likelihood of being hired by participant	5.77	1.166	5.81	1.059	37	-.103
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General Discussion

Linguistic abstraction affects our perception of language in subtle ways outside of conscious awareness. Most importantly, linguistic abstraction has been shown to influence what inferences people can draw about others. For this reason, the current study was designed to measure differences in professional evaluation based on differences in abstract language use, namely differences in individual person perception based on judgments in a hiring decision. The initial hypothesis stated that a significant difference in hireability, trait, and inference ratings would occur as a function of abstract or concrete language; this was not supported. This study attempted to find differences in individual person perception based on judgments made about hypothetical actors in a personally unrelated hiring decision. Although participants were asked to make judgments based on their perception of the material, the influence of linguistic abstraction failed to manifest when decisions were to be made about a scenario which was both imaginary, unrelated, and of likely low importance to the individual. This shift in context, then, represents the point of departure of the current study from previous experiments. However, the failure of the manipulation to find significant differences in perception renders the effects of linguistic abstraction in this context inconclusive.

In addition to the insignificant t values, it should be noted that the means for each item set appear quite high when compared to the highest possible score for each set. This suggests that a ceiling effect has occurred in which responses have become grouped within the upper range of

possible scores. This ceiling effect helps explain the failure of the manipulation because it is possible that the scores reflect participant acquiescence rather than an actual effect of linguistic abstraction.

Implications of the Current Study

The implications and conclusions that can be drawn from the findings remain speculative; however, the nature of the results inspires a new hypothesis on the contextual limits for the effect of linguistic abstraction. Previous studies and conceptions such as the LIB model of abstraction (Maas et al. 1989) demonstrate that this type of language use shows a large effect when the information being given is personally relevant, such as that used during interracial dialogue or expressing political partisanship. The LEB model of abstraction (Douglas & Sutton 2003) also functions based upon individual experience and what is expected to be true. The current study displaces this psychological distance even further by asking participants to make judgments about a hypothetical person who is being evaluated on the merit of his work as described by a supervisor. It could be possible that the power of linguistic abstraction diminishes as the person or group in question becomes further and further distanced in relation to the individual, to the point where abstractly- or concretely-charged language has no bearing on the listener's interpretation. The nature of the current study has led me to consider this hypothesis, yet the current results render the support for this speculation inconclusive.

Perhaps the most practical suggestion that can be drawn from the current study is related to the structure of experimental designs in psycholinguistic research. Variations in language use are very subtle forms of manipulation, but this issue is not restricted to research on linguistic abstraction. Any time a linguistic concept is hypothesized to have an effect on psychological processing, good experimental design dictates that the manipulation be set up in such a way that

researchers can say with certainty that any differences in the dependent variable are the result of the independent variable. However, language itself remains a very intangible concept and language recognition cannot be observed directly. It should be in the interest of psycholinguistic researchers to use physical measures to establish operational definitions of their independent variables. The operational definitions for linguistic abstraction used in the current study were scores from the measures of hireability, trait recognition, and inference making. The experimental design may have been strengthened from the use of physical measures as operational definitions, such as eye tracking, reading times, or electric signals from the brain. I think that future research on linguistic abstraction can benefit greatly by implementing physical measures in experimental designs.

Strengths and Limitations

Three factors likely inhibited the success of the current study. First, low participant turnout and the considerable rate of attrition likely affected the final results. At the departmental level, this study was being performed in competition for participants for several other, co-occurring studies, resulting in a smaller sample size. A handful of participants also failed to complete the study after being exposed to the experimental condition. Within the time frame allowed for the current study, not enough participants could be recruited to form a substantial sample size, affecting the overall results. Second, this study was distributed online due to convenience. Third, it is possible that the manipulation was unable to find significant differences in perception given the subtle manipulation of language involved in linguistic abstraction. However, the results also demonstrated one considerably strong feature, namely the high alpha levels of each scale, indicating that they have the potential to measure their respective constructs reliably. These scales could prove useful in a future study involving a stronger manipulation.

Future Research and Conclusions

Future research in this area should consider utilizing a laboratory from which to measure participant reactions. It is possible that the lack of physical setting inhibited the effects of such subtle variations in language. Without pragmatic context and experimenter supervision, results could vary greatly based on the environment in which the participant accessed the survey (time, location, distractions, etc.). Future research should also consider expanding into factorial designs measuring interactions between linguistic abstraction and other variables. Regardless of the method used, further research should focus on increasing statistical power in order to find more meaningful results (significant or nonsignificant). In general, studies on linguistic abstraction should focus on utilizing more innovative designs and observable operational definitions to account for subtle differences in language.

The current study sought to measure differences in perception caused by linguistic abstraction, yet found no significant results when abstraction was utilized in a decision-making context (e.g. hiring decisions). Despite being unable to reject the null hypothesis (that the conditions would not produce significant differences), the scales used in this study show promise for future research as measurements of hireability, personal traits, and making inferences. It remains unclear whether linguistic abstraction mediates judgment when asked to use lexically charged information to make a decision. However, such a relationship should prove important when trying to inhibit sources of bias, the kinds of which previous models of linguistic abstraction have discovered.

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Appendix

Informed consent

In this study you will be asked to evaluate a letter of recommendation for a job candidate written by a previous supervisor. Then you will be asked questions about the letter, including details about the candidate, writer, and job fit.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age.

The study will take between 15 and 20 minutes and you will receive ½ hour of research credit for PSYS 100.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits from participating in this study.

Data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for one year.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your responses are entirely anonymous. You may decide to not participate in this study at any time without prejudice from the investigator. If you decide to not finish the study, you will still be given research credit.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu. For questions about this research, you may contact the principle investigator; his contact information is provided below:

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Study overview

You will be shown a job description for the position of Human Resource Manager, followed by a letter of recommendation written by a previous supervisor for a potential job candidate. After reading

both pieces, you will be asked to answer questions regarding the letter, including details about the candidate, writer, and job fit.

Job description

Human Resource Managers are expected to organize and oversee workplace environment. Managers address worker productivity, adjustment, and concerns. They are responsible for coordinating workplace layout and office assignments. Managers are expected to be capable of resolving any quality-of-life issues employees have or be able to provide the resources to resolve these issues. Other responsibilities include:

- *Lead human resource team and oversee human resource projects*
-
- *Relay employee and quality-of-life assessments to Chief Executive Officer*
-
- *Appropriately document and store these assessments in a timely manner*
-
- *Provide authority in resolving employee and workplace related conflicts*
-
- *Communicate well and consistently with human resource team and other employees*

Abstract transcript

Please read the following letter of recommendation for Jim Thorpe, who is applying for a Human Resource position. This letter is written by Jim's former supervisor. This letter will be followed by a series of questions related to the content of the letter, so please read carefully.

To Whom It May Concern:

Jim Thorpe has been a valuable member of the Human Resource team at Outreach Services. I have been his supervisor for the past two years. Jim consistently impresses his peers, our employees, and myself and would prove a valuable asset in any human resource position.

Much can be said of his work ethic: Jim is a productive individual who understands what is expected of him. Even under pressure, Jim remains committed to his work and meets all requirements for any project admirably. Time and again, Jim was an encouraging member of our team. There can be little doubt that he is supportive of other coworkers and exhibits a cooperative attitude, fitting well into any group composition. He is organized and able to see optimal solutions to problems

that arise in the structure of the workplace. Jim is at his most creative when managing employee happiness, and prefers strategic outings and group-building exercises to foster cohesion among workers. Overall, he was a helpful person during our company's time of need.

I think that Mr. Thorpe would make a great addition to your company. I confidently recommend Jim Thorpe for your company's position of Human Resource Manager.

Concrete Transcript

Please read the following letter of recommendation for Jim Thorpe, who is applying for a Human Resource position. This letter is written by Jim's former supervisor. This letter will be followed by a series of questions related to the content of the letter, so please read carefully.

To Whom It May Concern:

Jim Thorpe has been a valuable member of the Human Resource team at Outreach Services. I have been his supervisor for the past two years. Jim consistently impresses his peers, our employees, and myself and would prove a valuable asset in any human resource position.

Much can be said of his work ethic: Jim produced work according to what was expected of him. Even under pressure, Jim was committed to his work and met all requirements for any project admirably. Time and again, Jim encouraged the members of our team. There can be little doubt that he supported other coworkers and cooperated well with any group composition. He organized employees and was able to see optimal solutions to problems that arose in the structure of the workplace. Jim created employee happiness by planning strategic outings and group-building exercises to foster cohesion among workers. He has always helped us when we needed it most.

I think that Mr. Thorpe would make a great addition to your company. I confidently recommend Jim Thorpe for your company's position of Human Resource Manager.

Scale 1: Candidate hirability

How confident is Jim's supervisor in his recommendation? (1 = Not at all confident, 7 = very confident)

How confident does Jim appear as an employee? (1 = Not at all confident, 7 = Very confident)

How likely is it that a potential employer would be willing to hire Jim based on this recommendation? (1 = Not at all likely, 7 = Very likely)

To what extent do you trust the supervisor's judgment (who wrote the letter)? (1 = Do not trust, 7 = Trust greatly)

To what extent does Jim appear fit for this job? (1 = Not at all fit, 7 = Very fit)

How likely would be to hire Jim based on this recommendation? (1 = Not at all likely, 7 = Very likely)

Scale 2: Candidate traits

How well do the following statements describe Jim? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very well)

Jim is creative.

Jim is encouraging.

Jim is supportive.

Jim is helpful.

Jim is committed.

Jim is organized.

Jim is productive.

Scale 3: Inferences about the candidate

Consider Jim as a person. Based on this letter, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Strongly agree, 7 = Strongly disagree)

Jim performed a majority of the work for the Human Resource team at Outreach Services.

Jim is only creative to the extent that a practical solution is needed. (R)

Jim only supports people who share his interests. (R)

Jim commits himself to his significant other.

Jim is only organized when his job demands it. (R)

Jim motivates others by his personality alone.

Jim regularly volunteers outside of work.

Jim takes vacations sparingly

Jim makes an effort to work well with others. (R)

Jim is naturally compelled to support others.

Jim doesn't cooperate if he doesn't have to. (R)

Jim tries to appear helpful for the sake of his image. (R)

Jim is likely to come up with solutions to many everyday problems.

Jim is only productive while at his job. (R)

Additional questions

What is your age?

If you are enrolled in PSYSC100, please indicate your first and last name (for the purposes of receiving course credit). If not, leave blank and proceed.

Debriefing

Thank you for participating in this study! The current study was designed to gauge people's evaluations of others based on the presentation of a written description. It is hypothesized that the use of different classes of verbs and adjectives can impact the overall evaluation of an individual. By studying the connection between language and inferences, psychologists can begin to recognize patterns of evaluation that arise from spoken and written communication.



Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE: December 11, 2014
TO: Kyle Buck
FROM: Ball State University IRB
RE: IRB protocol # 694228-1
TITLE: Effects of Abstract Language on Applicant Evaluation
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
DECISION DATE: December 11, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: **EXEMPT**

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on December 11, 2014 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
X	Category 2: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
	Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

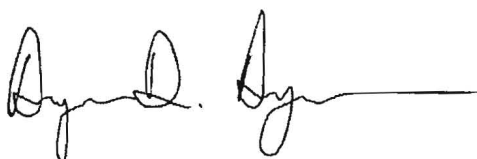
	Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.
	Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Editorial Notes:

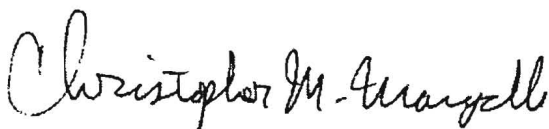
1. Approved- Exempt

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.



Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board



Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity